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Consular Affairs

7 FAM 1840

NATURAL DISASTERS

(CT:CON-471; 08-08-2013)

(Office of Origin: CA/OCS/L)

7 FAM 1841 SUMMARY

(CT:CON-142; 07-26-2006)

- a. 12 FAH-1 Annex I provides a series of checklists regarding assistance to U.S. citizens in a major disaster.
- b. 7 FAM 1840 provides more detailed guidance about consular protection of nationals in the event of a national disaster based on lessons learned from hurricanes, earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanoes, avalanches, typhoons, fires, and flash floods.
- c. See Crisis Management Lessons Learned on the CA/OCS Intranet.

7 FAM 1842 PREDICTABILITY OF NATURAL DISASTERS, PREPAREDNESS AND USE OF THE CONSULAR INFORMATION PROGRAM

(CT:CON-341; 08-27-2010)

- a. Posts should be familiar with the host countries' planning, alert response capabilities regarding natural disasters.
- b. Many natural disasters are not predictable. Some, like hurricanes, are seasonal.
- c. Every year, Consular Affairs uses the Consular Information Program – Travel Warnings, Travel Alerts, and Warden Messages (see 7 FAM 050) and warden systems (see 7 FAM 070) to remind citizens abroad of the coming of hurricane season. We have also issued Travel Alerts and Travel Warnings in the wake of predictable and unpredictable natural disaster. In addition, the CA Internet Page includes links to preparedness information. In the event of a disaster, CA uses the CA Internet Page to post information about the disaster.

See ...

Natural Disasters on the CA Internet Page

7 FAM 1843 RESPONSIBILITY OF GOVERNMENTS

(CT:CON-142; 07-26-2006)

- a. Article 37 of the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations (VCCR) provides that "If the relevant information is available to the competent authorities of the receiving State, such authorities shall have the duty: (a) in the case of the death of a national of the sending State, to inform without delay the consular post in whose district the death occurred." Bilateral consular conventions include similar provisions.
- b. See Treaties in Force on the Department of State Internet site, the bilateral consular conventions feature on the CA Internet page and the Treaty feature on the CA/OCS Intranet. See also Consular Access and Notification on the CA Internet page regarding the responsibilities for foreign nationals in the United States, including notification in the event of the death of foreign nationals.
- c. While the VCCR does not include similar provisions regarding injured nationals, as a matter of practice, countries often notify embassies and consulates of sending States in the event of the hospitalization of one of its nationals in the absence of a next-of-kin.

7 FAM 1844 DISASTER PLANNING SHOULD TAKE PLACE ALL YEAR ROUND - HURRICANE LESSONS LEARNED

(CT:CON-341; 08-27-2010)

The following reflects lessons learned from recent hurricane seasons, but may be helpful in planning for any natural disaster. Posts abroad that were confronted with large scale evacuations in the wake of hurricanes suggested the following:

- (1) Disaster preparation should take place throughout the entire year. The Chief of Mission, in addition to holding a town meeting at the beginning of the season, may wish to hold an off-hurricane-season town meeting to educate the community about hurricane preparedness.
- (2) Chief of Mission authority and DOS evacuation procedures must be clearly discussed in the off-season by the Emergency Action Committee (EAC) and country team.
- (3) The post may conduct this planning through the EAC or a specific Hurricane Action Committee, in its year-round education effort, will emphasize Chief of Mission authority, the "no double standard" policy (see 7 FAM 050), and the standards for authorized and ordered departure.
- (4) Post country team and EAC should include other federal agencies assigned to post to standardize the evacuation process for the various agencies at post prior to hurricane season. Areas of specific concern are:
 - (a) Ticketing;

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- (b) Evacuation sites;
 - (c) Services provided upon arrival at evacuation sites;
 - (d) Per diem; and
 - (e) The ability to differentiate between critical and non-critical employees.
- (5) Post will conduct a hurricane evacuation exercises periodically.
 - (6) EAC tripwires, previously based entirely on the hurricane's strength, size, speed, and predicted trajectory, should be revised to better take into account airline and airport closure policies.
 - (7) Post will identify more wardens on the larger islands and add wardens on the smaller islands.
 - (8) Post, with consular officers and the Public Affairs Officer working closely together, will review appropriate language and the clearance process of travel alerts and warden messages with CA/OCS before the hurricane season. (See 7 FAM 050).

For example:

Travel Alert June 2010 Hurricane Season
Hurricane Season – Know Before You Go

- (9) Have satellite phones ready in case all other communications fail.
- (10) Develop a communications strategy to reach the U.S. citizen public and implement this program as soon as possible. Communications with the public at large in a disaster environment can be very difficult. How would you communicate if there was no electricity? (See 7 FAM 070 for guidance about warden systems.)
- (11) As part of an overall communications campaign, visit as many disaster shelters as possible.
- (12) Evacuation teams should be prepared with Meals Ready to Eat (MREs), water filters, and bottled water for themselves. Evacuation teams should regularly check to ensure that items in the evacuation kits have not gone past their expiration dates. Post generally do not have such resources for potential private citizen evacuees and therefore CA/OCS issues a travel alert periodically reminding citizens traveling or residing abroad to make their own contingency plans for unforeseen disasters.

For example ...

Being Prepared for Any Crisis
General Advice for Americans Resident Overseas

- (13) Before arriving at the crisis scene, establish contacts, to the extent

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possible, with airport personnel, disaster preparedness offices, immigration, airlines, and with top-level government officials.

For example:

Is there a curfew in the area which could make movement of TDY or fly away team members difficult?

Does the consular district include a dependency of another country requiring authorizing from the capital city of the parent nation for actions by TDY or fly away team members?

- (14) Consider backcountry or military experience when staffing evacuation teams. Such prior experience can prove essential, as officers with this type of knowledge are prepared for the hardships of living in extreme environments and can focus on the task at hand.
- (15) Consider how long personnel can function productively and safely under dangerous and unknown work conditions. Plan for a follow on team to relieve the initial group of officers assisting with evacuation. If possible, arrange a briefing between the first and second evacuation teams to ensure the adequate transfer of on-the-ground knowledge.
- (16) Have necessary documents and supplies ready to go at a moment's notice. Supplies should include:
 - (a) Two-way radios;
 - (b) Promissory notes;
 - (c) Consular seals;
 - (d) Official letterhead;
 - (e) Travel letter templates;
 - (f) U.S. flags to display;
 - (g) Name and date stamps;
 - (h) Name/title tags; and
 - (i) Basic office supplies.
- (17) Post should be aware of applicable regulations and pre-arrange procedures with Department of Homeland Security (DHS) regarding handling undocumented U.S. citizens, Lawful Permanent Resident Aliens (LPRs), or third country national dependents of U.S. citizens that may arrive at entry points in the United States. This will facilitate quick processing and avoid confusion.

7 FAM 1845 CONSULAR RESPONSE TO A NATURAL DISASTER - TSUNAMI LESSONS LEARNED

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The following are lessons learned from the 2004 Tsunami, but will be helpful for posts confronting any large scale natural disaster:

- (1) **Get to the scene of the disaster** as quickly as possible with even more resources than you think you really need. Realize that, unlike plane crashes and terrorist attacks, natural disasters often affect a wide spread area and covering the entire disaster area will require intensive coordination and resource management. If post has an active warden program, rely on your wardens to cover areas you cannot reach and to augment coverage in heavily affected areas.
- (2) **Ask For Help:** a key lesson learned from the 2004 Tsunami and the 2004-2005 Hurricanes was the importance of asking for and receiving help for the consular section as quickly as possible.

Note: Requests for consular additional help should be made to the consular task force operation. The CA Task Force Director will coordinate with CA/EX and CGFS. CA/EX has provided CA/OCS/ACS Crisis Management with blanket travel orders for TDYers traveling from Washington, DC. If we are sending officers from neighboring posts, CA/EX either prepares the orders in Washington or reimburses the post. We use whatever method gets people on the plane the fastest to get you the help you need.

- (3) **Mission-Wide Support:** A large-scale disaster requires a full mission-wide response. Consular teams cannot deploy and function effectively without the simultaneous deployment of essential mission-wide support.
- (4) **Additional locally employed staff (LE staff) Support:** If more officers are needed to respond to the disaster, more locally employed staff (LE staff) will also be required. These LE Staff play an integral role in ensuring that the ACS unit can maintain a high level of citizen's services. Using supplemental LE Staff who do not speak the local language to perform routine functions in your American Citizen Services (ACS) unit frees up local LE staff for work that requires language skills, geographic familiarity or good contacts with host government personnel and local institutions.
- (5) **Logistics and TDY:** Understand the Temporary Duty (TDY) process and the realities of international travel. Asking for people today means they will probably arrive 2 days later, at best. Do not wait for an acute need before requesting assistance. Ask before you think you are going to really need it. If you are relying on a large number of TDY staff, dedicate

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someone - preferably a skilled Office Management Specialist (OMS)-- to take care of and track all necessary travel, hotel, and logistical arrangements, much of which will change before the person arrives. For small posts in particular, remember that you will not operate in a vacuum during a crisis. The Department will also be monitoring the situation from the moment the disaster strikes and trying to assess post's needs.

- (6) **Coordination with Management Section:** Consular sections should coordinate closely with post Management sections regarding equipment needs for TDY and fly away teams, including, but not limited to, embassy vehicles or rented vehicles; magnetic U.S. flags on car doors, etc.
- (7) **Divide work responsibilities and assign clear roles** among your staff and make sure everyone knows who does what. Designating a "hospital officer," "database manager," "volunteer coordinator," and "correspondence manager" helps volunteers and new staff know who to turn to with specific questions.

7 FAM 1846 EARTHQUAKES

(CT:CON-341; 08-27-2010)

- a. The Office of Foreign Buildings Operations' publication Earthquake Preparedness at U.S. Foreign Service Posts provides guidance useful in post planning which CA also utilizes when we include language in Country Specific Information about individual countries which a higher risk of earthquake activity.
- b. The CA Internet page natural disasters site provides useful links to FEMA, CDC, U.S. Geological Survey and Red Cross material about earthquake preparedness and disaster response.

See ...

FEMA Hazards: Earthquakes

FEMA Earthquakes Planning Considerations

FEMA Are Your Ready - Earthquakes

FEMA What to do Before and Earthquake

FEMA What to do During and Earthquake

FEMA What to do After and Earthquake

FEMA for Kids - Earthquakes

CDC Earthquakes

U.S. Geological Survey Earthquake Hazards Program

- c. U.S. and foreign embassies and consulates also have post web page material with links to local information about earthquakes and include earthquake

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preparedness discussions in EAC meeting and warden system briefings.

See ...

U.S. Embassy Tokyo – Disaster Preparedness Checklist for Americans in Japan

British Embassy Tokyo – Earthquakes in Japan

Embassy of Switzerland Tokyo – Earthquake Preparedness

- d. Foreign governments also have useful earthquake sites to which posts may wish to link their post web pages.

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